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Articles in Today's Clips Monday, July 16, 2007

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<u>TOPIC</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
* Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-15
Foster Care	16-20
Adult Foster Care	21
Child Custody	22-28
Elder Abuse	29-32
Health Care	33-36
Food Assistane	37
Utilities Assistance	38-42
State Employees	43-48

*Important story at this spot



Trial ordered in child's death

Foster mom held; details of injury mysterious

July 14, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

An assistant Wayne County prosecutor admitted Friday that his office has no idea exactly how 2-year-old Allison Newman was fatally injured in a Canton Township foster home in September, but said the girl's foster mother should be tried anyway on murder and child abuse charges.

Wayne County Circuit Judge Ulysses Boykin agreed with the prosecutor, Jerry Dorsey IV, and denied a motion by an attorney for the foster mother, Carol Poole, to require prosecutors to describe exactly how they believe Allison's death occurred.

Medical doctors have said that although Allison died of blunt force trauma, like her head striking a wall or a floor, they could not determine exactly how the injury happened.

Poole, 42, told Canton police she was swinging the child in a circle in a game of "whirlybird" while they were near the top of the stairway on the second-floor of her home on Emily Court.

Poole said she lost her grip and Allison fell more than 12 feet to the hardwood floor. Poole admitted not seeking immediate help for the child.

Police say hours went by before she called 911 at 1:30 a.m. on Sept. 22.

Poole's attorney, Mark Satawa, argued that it was not fair for Poole to have to defend herself when she doesn't know what the prosecution claims actually happened.

The judge, however, said there was enough evidence for jurors to consider whether she is guilty as charged of first-degree felony murder or a lesser charge.

Boykin delayed ruling on Satawa's request to exclude Poole's statements from the trial, pending testimony July 23. No trial date has been set. Poole remains jailed without bond.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

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[Back](#)

Article published Jul 15, 2007

Judge won't drop charges against woman in child's death

By TIFFANY L. PARKS
Staff Writer

Carol Poole gasped and cried at the mention of her dead foster child's name, but Kenneth Newman, the toddler's paternal grandfather, said he isn't buying it.

"I have no doubt about it," said Newman, referring to the state's accusations that the Canton woman, 42, intentionally killed her 2-year-old foster child, Allison Newman, on Sept. 22, 2006. "We know the truth."

Poole, who police say gave multiple stories after Allison's death, has been charged with felony murder, first-degree child abuse and involuntary manslaughter.

On Friday, Poole's attorney, Mark Satawa, unsuccessfully tried to get Circuit Court Judge Ulysses W. Boykin to toss out the felony murder and first-degree child abuse charges.

Satawa argued the state hadn't presented any evidence at Poole's preliminary examination that suggested she intended for the child to die.

"Not only is there insufficient evidence, there's no evidence that satisfies that element," he said.

Boykin disagreed and said there was probable cause to bind Poole over, but offered that the evidence presented may not be "enough to sustain any conviction."

After the judge's ruling, Satawa announced he would confer with Poole and possibly appeal the decision.

In a separate motion, the defense is asking the court to suppress statements Poole made to police after Allison's death.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Jerry Dorsey IV argued that Poole was in her right mind when she waived her Miranda rights and spoke to police.

Two Canton detectives testified on Friday and another detective is scheduled to appear before Boykin on July 23 regarding the issue.

According to the detectives, Poole offered four different explanations for Allison's injuries, including that she slipped in the shower and accidentally fell from a second-floor balcony during a game of "whirlybird."

An autopsy on the toddler showed she had a skull fracture, bleeding over the surface of the brain and brain swelling. The Washtenaw County Medical Examiner ruled the child's death was of an "indeterminate" manner.

Although he testified that Poole said she wanted to die three times during their interview, Canton Detective Michael Steckel said he doubted her sincerity.

"She was crying without tears," he said.

If convicted on the three charges, Poole could face life in jail.

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the SOURCE

Baby dies in Sterling Heights home

By JOCELYN MARINO
Source Staff Writer

An 18-month-old boy was found dead in a Sterling Heights home July 9, where police found evidence of a methamphetamine lab.

The parents, Andrew Young, 26, and Tina Boughner, 28, were charged with operating and maintaining a drug house in the presence of a child, and operating and maintaining a drug house near a school. The home, in the 42000 block of Betley, is adjacent to Ford II High School.

The pair was arraigned July 10 in 41-A District Court and bond for both was set at \$400,000 cash or surety only. They are both due back in court July 23. Both of the charges are 20-year felonies.

Sterling Heights Police Lt. Robert Henigan said that the investigation into the child's death is continuing and, depending on the findings, the parents may be charged at a later date.

"We are still waiting on the full findings from the autopsy, such as lab work," Henigan said. "We want to have all the evidence before we go forward."

According to police reports, officers responded to the home after Boughner called 9-1-1 to report that the baby was not breathing. Officers attempted to revive the baby, but he was pronounced dead the scene.

While investigating the child's death, an officer located what appeared to be a lab used to make methamphetamine.

At that point, the police called in the Sterling Heights Fire Department's hazmat unit, as well as the Michigan State Police, who made arrangements to have the chemicals removed, and the Drug Enforcement Agency.

Henigan said that the couple's 5-year-old daughter was in the care of her grandparents at the time of the baby's death and her parent's arrest. He said that Child Protective Services is looking into the welfare of that child.

Click here to return to story:

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[<<Back](#)



Homicide charge in death of 8-month-old

Updated: July 16, 2007 07:38 AM EDT

GRAND RAPIDS -- A man has been arraigned in the felony homicide of an 8-month old girl shaken to death on Monday.

Jeffery Michael Mata, 21, was arrested originally on 1st-degree child abuse charges. The charges were changed to felony homicide after the girl was taken off life support Tuesday night.

Grand Rapids police were called Monday to an apartment on Stonebrook NE. A neighbor told 24 Hour News 8 she saw authorities carry the girl out of that apartment and say she appeared to be blue.

The girl was taken to Spectrum Butterworth Hospital with severe internal bleeding to her head.

Mata is the boyfriend of the girl's mother and shares the apartment with the woman.

24 Hour News 8 spoke with friends of Mata who say the accusations against their friend are "out of character."

Mata's preliminary exam is scheduled for July 25.

24 Hour News 8 will have more details as they become available.



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Woman gets 25 years for torturing twins

Grand Haven Tribune

Fri, Jul 13, 2007

MOUNT CLEMENS (AP) — A 30-year-old Warren woman convicted of torturing her adopted 8-year-old twin daughters was sentenced Thursday to up to 25 years in prison.

Tamika Williams was convicted last month of two counts each of torture and first-degree child abuse. She stabbed the girls with glass and knives, beat them with cable wire, shoes and exercise equipment, bathed them in bleach water, burned them with cigarettes and dunked them in a toilet filled with urine, according to court filings and prosecutors.

The children reportedly suffered bruises, welts and burns until they were taken from the home in November. They are now in foster care.

Williams, who adopted the girls in 2008 from a home in Southfield, said the twins harmed themselves and that she didn't notice the marks investigators said covered them.

Court hearings had to be delayed because the twins were reportedly too afraid of her to take the stand.

Williams could have faced up to life in prison.



Dad acquitted of beating naked son

Saturday, July 14, 2007

By Steven Hepker

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The initial reports of a dad whipping his naked son up and down a city street last summer seemed outrageous.

A jury, however, sided with a more benign account of justified punishment gone awry.

After deliberating an hour, a jury this week acquitted Donald Williams of child abuse.

"He admitted he ordered the boy to strip and he did whip him with a belt," defense attorney Alfred Brandt said Friday. "He whipped him on the shoulder, back and butt."

But the 14-year-old son dashed down the sidewalk naked on his own, and the father forced him back to his house, said Brandt.

Assistant Prosecutor Nick Mehalco argued Williams forced his son down the street with his big belt, tormenting him in public.

"That is a cruel act under the state's second-degree child abuse statute," Mehalco said.

The trial stemmed from a July 19 incident in the 400 block of W. High Street. Williams, who is divorced from the boy's mother, was away for a few days and his house was supposed to be closed when a friend notified him he saw youths enter.

Testimony varied, but it appears the boy let two male friends take two females into the house to have sex. The son did not live in the house.

Williams, summoned by his friend, Sherman White, came home and confronted his son. At some point he told the boy to strip for a whipping with a thick leather belt.

"The father had disciplined him before with a belt," Brandt said.

The boy ran out of Williams' home and down the street, and the father retrieved him, Brandt said. A passerby called 911 to report a man beating a naked boy with a belt.

The boy testified his father beat him and forced him down the street. White and Williams said the boy streaked on his own.

Williams was not available for comment. Brandt said his client was laid off from his job when he was charged, and also was ordered not to contact his son. Williams got his job back after he was acquitted, Brandt said.

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The Daily Telegram

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MONDAY JULY 16, 2007 Last modified: *Friday, July 13, 2007 11:48 PM EDT*

Child sex case advances

Douglas Jay Clark, who faces 76 felony counts involving alleged sexual molestation of six different children, will go to trial Aug. 1.

From staff reports

ADRIAN — Child sex abuse cases against the operator of the former Guardian Family Daycare in Adrian are headed toward a trial that is to begin Aug. 1 in Lenawee County Circuit Court. Douglas Jay Clark, 53, appeared briefly on Wednesday for a hearing where his attorney said there are no issues to settle before the trial.

Public defender John Glaser told the court that after reviewing Adrian police reports he has decided not to file any pretrial motions challenging the charges against Clark. He faces 76 felony counts involving alleged sexual molestation of six different children, some of them infants he reportedly videotaped while performing sex acts on them.

Clark was arrested in March after a parent reported Clark had sent sexually explicit messages to her son over the Internet. Police reported finding incriminating videotapes after obtaining a search warrant for the home-based day care center on Erie Street.

Clark remains in jail in lieu of a \$5 million bond set after his arrest.

The trial is to include 11 separate cases and charges that range from first-degree criminal sexual conduct to using a computer to commit a crime.

-- CLOSE WINDOW--



KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Two men charged with trying to lure boy for sex

Monday, July 16, 2007

Associated Press

ROMULUS -- Two Port Huron men, one a registered sex offender, face felony charges after police say they spent three days last week attempting to lure what they thought was a 14-year-old boy over the Internet ``for a weekend of sex."

The ``boy" was an undercover Wayne County sheriff's deputy, the Detroit News and Free Press reported Sunday.

Gordon Henry Deshon, 42, and Raymond Baker, 42, were charged Saturday in Romulus District Court with child sexually abusive activity, a 20-year felony; disseminating obscene material to a minor, a two-year felony; and using the Internet to disseminate obscene material to a minor, a four-year felony.

Deshon also was charged with illegal use of the Internet and attempted third-degree criminal sexual conduct, a 20-year felony.

The men were arrested Thursday after chatting online for three days last week with an undercover deputy, Wayne County Sheriff Warren Evans said. He said the men drove to the Detroit area for an anticipated meeting with the underage boy, whom they planned to take back to Port Huron for a weekend of sex.

Evans said that during the online chats, the men also performed oral sex on each other in front of a Web camera.

Deshon has been a registered sex offender since 2002 but had not registered his current address with authorities as required by law, a felony punishable by up to five years in prison.

During a search of Deshon's apartment, police seized a computer and determined the address is less than 100 yards from a public playground frequented by children. That violates the registry act, which prohibits sex offenders from living closer than 500 feet from a playground.

The apartment also is near the complex's swimming pool, which is frequented by children, Evans said.

``This case clearly illustrates why the Sex Offender Registry is important to protecting people, especially children, from the kind of abuse Deshon and his friend were attempting to arrange," Evans said.

The two men are each being held in Wayne County Jail on \$250,000 cash bond. Their next court date is July 26.

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Published July 15, 2007

Board approves funding for key program

By TOM THELEN
Editor

IONIA — Ionia County officials have agreed to provide funding for a program to assist area families after the state eliminated its funding of the program.

The Ionia County Board of Commissioners authorized the spending of \$20,000 in funds for a Wraparound program offered by Ionia County Community Mental Health. The program had received funding from the state's Strong Families, Safe Children initiative in previous years. However, state officials discontinued the program.

"We have been told that we will no longer receive funding for this program after July 1," said Robert Lathers, director of Ionia County CMH. "The CMH can fund the rest of this year and most of the next fiscal year. However, we would still need about \$20,000 to completely fund the program."

The Wraparound program is one of many programs that Ionia County CMH offers to area families. The program involves a family-centered planning process that involves multiple agencies working together to help families that are at risk of losing their children to help keep them at home.

"These children would end up in foster care or in a residential treatment center, both of which are expensive options," said Lathers. "Plus, once a child is removed, there is a greater risk that they never return and end up a part of the welfare system. With this program, the different agencies come together to decide what they need to do to keep the child in the home. It is better for the child emotionally and it is a lot less expensive."

Lathers said the program assisted 101 children in 39 families during the past year.

"Through this program, many different agencies come together to provide help for these families," said Lathers. "Had it not been for this program, I believe some of the problems would have escalated to the point that some of these children would be in the juvenile court system."

Ionia County Probate Court Judge Robert Sykes agreed with Lathers.

"There is no doubt that the Wraparound process is very beneficial because it results in collaboration by many agencies," said Sykes. "We have all talked about collaboration, but now we are moving from the talking phase to the action phase. I think this is a very reasonable request because by spending some funds on children now will help avoid spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on those same children down the road."

Ionia County administrator Mark Howe said the county could provide \$5,000 now and then reserve \$15,000 in the next budget for the program.

"This program has done a great service of working with families," said Commissioner Larry Tiejema.

"This just isn't someone working out of an office. This program involves interacting with families to provide assistance. It is a great program."

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07/16/2007

Center focused on intervening in child abuse and neglect

By [Kelly Dame](#)

Tucked out of the way along Jefferson Avenue is a building with two comfortable rooms where children can feel at ease while telling what has happened to them at the hands of adults. Those stories could eventually lead to prosecution, and most certainly will put children on the road to the help they need to be kids again.

It's the Safe & Sound Child Advocacy Center, in the works since 2002. It is the collective vision of the people who make up the Midland County Child Protection Council, moving them from preventing child abuse and neglect into the realm of intervening, said Karen Adams, of the center. The center serves to protect and assist child victims, ages 17 and under, of suspected physical or sexual abuse. It also serves the non-offending family members.

"They're just typical kids," Adams said. "They have no idea this isn't how the world should work."

When kids step into the center, they're greeted by brightly colored artwork made by kids enrolled in HeadStart programs -- one is a montage of pink and purple finger paintings. All are framed and hanging on the walls at just the right height for kids to appreciate.

Since the center is for children, it was important to make it feel like somewhere children had been, Adams said. "They knew that they were doing it for other kids," she added of the HeadStart artists.

The artwork and brightly decorated interior lend a friendlier atmosphere to families going through the process of reporting abuse, interviewing, and ending abuse, than the landscape of the Midland County Law Enforcement Center, a harsh contrast with gray walls and a bevy of locked doors.

According to advocacy center literature, more than 150 Midland County children were confirmed to be the victims of abuse or neglect in one year. An unknown number of others were never reported.

In addition to existing programs of the child protection council, the center offers forensic interviewing by referral from law enforcement or the Department of Human Services, as well as information on how to obtain counseling services through a partnership with Shelterhouse, though Adams is finding that some families already have taken that step on their own.

Adams said part of planning the center was gauging how many interviews might be needed per year, and a number of 150 to 200 was used after looking at numbers from law enforcement, the courts, and DHS.

"We're finding that so many cases get investigated but don't make it to court," she said.

Adams said the center's existence is made more important by the fact that a growing population inevitably means more children will become victims of abuse.

"As the population grows, I expect we will grow as well," she said. "We want to shut our doors, to not be needed, but not yet ... Not yet."

Future goals include a medical component. Adams pointed out an examination table -- donated by the Neighborhood Clinic -- tucked into a back room, the first part of being able to make information gathering a one-stop process. The stumbling block is providing medical liability insurance, but Adams explained that once the insurance is in place, nurses from the hospital could come to the center to conduct the exams.

Startup costs were provided by the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation, The Herbert H. and Grace A. Dow Foundation and the Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation. The center provides services free of charge.

Other programs the center offers include:

Adopt a Child's Smile Program, which provides basic dental care to low-income, uninsured county children

Babylonian Encounter, a play addressing safe touch for elementary kids

Child Passenger Safety Program, purchasing and distributing car seats to families, as well as instruction in proper use

Partnership with Youth, a collaborative community effort to assess, evaluate and respond to needs of community adolescents

Communication Lunch Box Speaker Series, programs to benefit family service workers

Positive Parenting for Pre-Schoolers, interactive group for parents of young preschoolers to guide and support through their child's developmental stages

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07/16/2007

Forensic interviewing tough, but worthwhile

By [Kelly Dame](#)



Daily News photos/BRETT MARSHALL

"It's really hard to hear this stuff," Cindy Reeves said before interviewing a child who had been sexually assaulted. Reeves aids police in their investigations as the Safe & Sound Child Advocacy Center's child forensic interviewer. "I'm more of a voice for the child," she said of the interviews, which are designed to reduce the trauma experienced by children.

Cynthia Reeves is a fresh-faced, bubbly young woman who is eager to help children get on with their lives.

She is happy to point out the tiny denim blue chair with red trim that is parked in a corner of an interview room for small children, and she knows that she's helping the little ones she talks to even though her job sometimes feels cold.

Reeves is the forensic interviewer at the Safe and Sound Child Advocacy Center, talking to child victims of suspected physical or sexual abuse when she's called upon by law enforcement officials or the state's Department of Human Services. She has a psychology degree and has undertaken specialized training from the Prosecutor Attorney's Association of Michigan and the National Children's Advocacy Center in Huntsville, Alabama.

"I didn't really know what I was getting into," she said of answering the job advertisement for her current position.

More than 20 interviews later, she's got a good idea.

There was the 2-year-old girl who just didn't have the verbal skills to tell what happened to her, and was more interested in eating the clay she was playing with. Some children, just a little bit older, take the blame for the abuse they endured, and aren't yet comfortable using the words for their body parts and need paper and pencil to write them down.

Worse yet, these children accept the abuse as a normal part of life, she said. She adds the older ones have a harder time talking because they know it's not right.

Advertisement

"Then there was the little girl that was fluffing her hair" in the two-way mirror, Reeves said. The mirror allows representatives from the prosecutor's office, law enforcement and Child Protective Services a front row seat to the interviews; they communicate with Reeves through an earpiece to make sure she can draw out more information if it's needed. That way, the children don't have to be interviewed multiple times by multiple people.



Chief Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Erik S. H. Wallen, right, and Detective Lt. Vincent W. Szilagyi of the Midland County Sheriff's Office view through one-way glass a child forensic interview conducted by Cindy Reeves.

"We don't want to traumatize them," Reeves said. The room also has equipment to make video cassettes and DVD recordings of the interviews. The recordings are not admissible in court.

Cameras in one room allow for closer views of whatever children might be drawing.

Working as a forensic interviewer means Reeves uses her easy-going nature to make friends with the kids she talks to, building a rapport with them by asking about skateboarding, Rugrats, or anything else that they can identify with. She lets them know that it's OK to talk with her. She also is tasked with making sure the children know the difference between telling the truth and a lie, then makes sure they agree to tell her the truth.

After they tell their stories of abuse -- be it sexual or physical -- Reeves feels bad because she can't comfort them by saying "I'm so sorry," but instead has to stick with a generic "Oh, OK."

The harshness is made palatable by the good in her work.

"I know I'm making a difference," she said, adding investigators have been good about keeping her up to date on the cases. "I feel like everyone is so supportive."

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Bill would privatize foster care

Sunday, July 15, 2007

By Christina Hildreth

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Charlene Baker knows about raising foster children. In 34 years, she and her husband, Jimmy, have cared for more than 100.

She has had children placed with her both through the Department of Human Services and private agencies, but she would much rather work with the private agencies.

"I can pick up my cell phone and call a boy's caseworker 24/7," she said. "I never got that out of DHS."

If a proposal in the 2007-08 DHS budget makes it through the Michigan Legislature, Baker will be working with private agencies more often.

The proposal would privatize more than 2,800 foster-care and 209 juvenile justice cases statewide. About 65 percent of the foster-care caseload in Michigan is contracted through private agencies, but rates vary from county to county. If the proposal passes, 96 percent would be privatized.

About 47 percent of Jackson County's 397 cases are privatized. It is unclear how many children in the county would move to private agencies if the proposal passes, officials said.

If passed, the bill would take effect Oct. 1.

Proponents say it would save millions of dollars and provide better service. Opponents say it would diminish public oversight of vital programs.

According to the Senate Fiscal Agency, the proposal would eliminate more than 800 state employee positions and save the state \$19 million.

"My opinion is that it's cheaper for a private because we don't have the massive overhead, the required retirement benefits that the state does," said Judy Jove, executive director of Family Service and Children's Aid.

But opponents say the savings isn't worth the risk.

State Sen. Mark Schauer, D-Battle Creek, said he is wary of the proposal.

"Many options are still being considered to address the budget crisis, but anything that might sacrifice the safety of our children should be taken off the table," he said. "Privatization proponents have promised the moon and the stars in the past, and we've found the actual results come up far short."

First Ward City Councilman Carl Breeding said the foster-care and juvenile-justice systems are already broken, but privatization would make the problem worse.

"If it gets to become private, we won't have any way for accountability," he said.

DHS is also against the proposal.

Spokeswoman Maureen Sorbet said the department does not foresee significant savings from the transition and is concerned it might not be best for the children.

If the bill passes, the state would retain oversight and monitoring responsibilities while private agencies would provide more direct service. Proponents say that's the way it should be.

"The state can do what it does best in terms of oversight and monitoring and the private sector agencies can do what they do best in terms of the actual service delivery," said Marty Mitchell, president and chief executive of Albion-based Starr Commonwealth, a private foster-care agency.

Currently, children enter private agencies only if DHS foster homes cannot meet their needs. DHS services program manager Jerome Colwell said this can happen if DHS caseworkers have full caseloads, or if the state is trying to keep a group of siblings together.

Colwell is in charge of foster-care placements in Jackson County.

Both Jove and Mitchell said their agencies would expect to pick up more foster-care cases if the proposal gets through the legislature.

That could happen in the next few weeks, said Kelly Bartlett, legislative aide for Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, the bill's sponsor. As soon as the Senate and House iron out the details of next year's budget, the bill will advance to a vote, he said.

In the meantime, Hardiman's staff continues to research the proposal and talk with constituents, Bartlett said.

"There's still some things we'd like to work out with the Department (of Human Services)," he said. "But the sum total of those items is really small."

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CASA welcomes newest additions to program

CHARLOTTE — CASA recently welcomed six people sworn in as the newest additions to the Eaton County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Kids program.

On June 18 the newest CASA volunteers raised their right hand and took the oath of Officer of the Court. Each volunteer pledged to support the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution State of Michigan, and to faithfully discharge the duties of the Court Appointed Special Advocates in and for the County of Eaton and State of Michigan. Each CASA volunteer completed 35 hours of training and observed court hearings before taking the oath.

CASA for Kids of Eaton County is a non-profit organization that recruits and trains volunteers to advocate for children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse and neglect. A volunteer advocate's role is to visit with the children on their assigned case once every seven to 10 days and provide an independent assessment to the court about all aspects of a child's life. The CASA volunteer's assessment reflects the strengths and needs of the child, the child's family, and caregivers. CASA volunteer recommendations are totally independent of any state agency and are predicated solely upon the child's best interests.

Judge Michael Skinner recognized the new volunteers saying, "Welcome to the world of helping children in a unique and special way." Judge Skinner went on to say, "You will be providing consistency the children may have never had before... You will have a hand in their [children] emotional healing."

"The CASA staff is pleased with the outstanding citizens who step forward to help the susceptible children of Eaton County," Executive Director Steve McEldowney said of the newest recruits. "We are proud to be associated with these new volunteers who are willing to sacrifice some of their free time and be a stabilizing benefit to these vulnerable children."

The Eaton County CASA program now has 45 volunteers advocating for 49 foster children — an increase in the number of volunteers from 14, fifteen months ago. Despite this growth, CASA is in need of an additional 40 volunteers to serve the children in foster care. Currently, there are more than 90 children in foster care in Eaton County. Only 50 percent of these children have a volunteer advocate speaking on their behalf. The need is great as the number of child abuse and neglect cases has increased 40 percent since 1997.

Eaton County CASA has various volunteering opportunities to help the children of Eaton County who have been abused or neglected. The next advocate training begins in August. If you are interested in becoming a CASA volunteer advocate please contact Michelle Bates or Kimberly Cena at (517) 543-3974 or e-mail us at casa@eatoncounty.org.

— *From Eaton County CASA for Kids*

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Published July 15, 2007

Outreach program needs donations

LANSING — The Child & Family Services' (CFS) Supervised Independent Living Services (SILS) program is looking for a community group, corporate entity, or a few individuals who might be willing to help raise funds or donate to keep the program thriving.

CFS provides mid-Michigan's only SILS program for teens who are aging out of the foster care system. The state has notified CFS that the annual grant which funds the SILS program will be cut by almost \$10,000 — not an amount CFS can "absorb" in an already tight budget year.

SIL provides guidance and supportive services to teens who are nearing the age of 18 and who haven't been adopted. These kids don't have the same advantages as many of us had as young adults. These kids have few, if any, adult influences who can help them get into college, establish a household, get a job, etc.

National studies show that more than 50 percent of the kids who age out of the foster care system without additional assistance end up either homeless or incarcerated. The SILS program works to combat that statistic and we have a high rate of success. Any help will be greatly appreciated. Contact Mary Reed, director of Fund Development Child & Family Services, Capital Area 4287 Five Oaks Dr. Lansing, MI 48911 at (517) 882-4000, ext.126.

— *From Child & Family Services.*

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07/13/2007

Speakers at hearing plead for changes at Pinecrest

By [Cheryl Wade](#)

What do you do with square pegs when the world is full of round holes?

Homer Township Supervisor Julie Atkinson asked that question Thursday during a hearing about the future of Midland County's Pinecrest Farms, a 53-bed home licensed as an adult foster care home and one of two infirmaries in the state. Atkinson said she doesn't have all the answers, but she wants Pinecrest to continue "to help some of our valuable square pegs."

About two dozen people spoke at the hearing, which drew more than 50. Several asked county commissioners to put a proposal on the ballot to raise 0.37 mill for 20 years to operate the home and expand it to fit 61 residents in less crowded conditions than now. Many of the residents now live in four-person rooms with half-walls separating pairs of beds.

Last year, Pinecrest's operating cost was \$1.29 million, with \$598,000 coming from the county's general fund. This year, the county will spend an estimated \$707,000, said county Administrator/Controller David Benda. Renovation costs are estimated at \$7.9 million. A big cost will be to create bathrooms for each bedroom, so residents no longer will have to share bathrooms at ends of halls, Benda said.

Mark Stevens, director of Midland County's Department of Human Services office, said half of Pinecrest's 48 residents now are clients of his department.

"It was one of the great joys for me when I got here to find you had a facility such as Pinecrest," he said. "The care and the service that our folks get at Pinecrest is head and shoulders above anything else I've seen" at similar facilities elsewhere.

Pinecrest's budget woes didn't escape audience members. Kathleen Crippen, whose parents managed Pinecrest's predecessor, the county poor farm, in the 1950s, said Pinecrest is in direct competition with private facilities. They, too, house people who are disabled and receive government assistance.

"They do this somehow and don't ask the taxpayers for more money to do it," she said. "And now we say the county can't do the same thing."

Former County Commissioner Ron Beech suggested an operating millage alone, plus a citizens committee to study Pinecrest's future. Perhaps such a committee would decide to start all over with a new facility, he said.

Mount Haley Township Trustee Rich Keenan said the people of Midland County don't question the residents' need for care. But he wondered how many \$100,000 homes with bathrooms and good plumbing could be bought with \$7.9 million. "That's very extravagant," he said of the cost figure.

Rebecca Waterman, wife of county Commissioner Bill Waterman, called Pinecrest a steppingstone to more independent living, but said the county should look into having a non-profit group manage it or making it a private-pay facility. Businesses would be taxed to pay for the renovation, then the county could attract private-paying residents, and she doesn't think government should compete with private groups.

Richard Fairley, on the other hand, encouraged the county to keep Pinecrest. Without the home, he believes many of its residents would be discarded and forgotten, and some would end up costing the county money by ending up in the court system.

"You can't just throw some of these people away," he said. "They're not discardable, they're people. You can't just toss these people and forget about them."

The county board will discuss its options at its Human Services Committee meeting Monday at 9 a.m. and at Monday's 2 p.m. Finance Committee meeting. The millage issue will come before the full board Tuesday at its 9 a.m. meeting. The full board and finance meet in the board room, while human services meets in the first floor conference room. Meetings are in the Midland County Services Building, 220 W. Ellsworth St.

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Muskegon Chronicle

Kids placed in foster care following crash that killed teen

Saturday, July 14, 2007

By John S. Hausman

jhausman@muskegonchronicle.com

A Muskegon County Family Court referee has placed in foster care the surviving children of a mother who he determined had repeatedly let her unlicensed 15-year-old daughter drive -- leading to the girl's death and three siblings' serious injuries in a Robinson Township collision.

After a two-day hearing, Referee Jerry Gibbs on Friday ordered Graciella Trevino's custody rights over her four surviving children revoked. Three, ages 12, 9 and 5, are at Spectrum Health Butterworth Campus with injuries sustained in the two-car collision Monday that killed their sister, 15-year-old Claudia Trevino.

A newborn daughter, born to Trevino July 3 in Grand Rapids, has been in the custody of the Department of Human Services since Wednesday. A court referee in Kent County ordered her placement, then sent the issue to Muskegon County for further hearings because Graciella Trevino previously was dealing with child-custody issues here.

Trevino's children had been in foster care, but were returned in the weeks before the crash.

Gibbs found clear and convincing evidence that Trevino had a pattern of allowing Claudia Trevino to drive unlicensed, said Muskegon County Prosecutor Tony Tague, whose office argued the case for removal on behalf of the state.

Tague said he will refer the case to the Ottawa County Prosecutor's Office for possible criminal prosecution. Allowing an unlicensed driver to drive is a misdemeanor.

"It appears there were other cases where (Claudia's) driving had been questionable and could have resulted in harm on prior occasions," Tague said. "This is highly unfortunate that a mother would allow her children to engage in conduct which endangered all her very young children."

Claudia Trevino had been a student at Lakeshore Middle School in Grand Haven.

Graciella Trevino has been a migrant worker in West Michigan for the past seven years. She is not a U.S. citizen, nor was Claudia, but the other children are, police said.

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Mother of teen killed in crash loses custody battle

Sat, Jul 14, 2007

BY CHRIS EPPLETT

cepplett@grandhaventribune.com

MUSKEGON — A Muskegon County judge has removed the custody rights for three of the four surviving children of the mother whose 15-year-old girl died Monday in a two-car accident in Robinson Township.

Graciella Trevino appeared before Judge William Marietti during a hearing in Muskegon County Family Court Friday afternoon. More than two hours after the hearing began, Marietti decided in favor of an emergency removal petition submitted by county prosecutors Thursday, removing Trevino's three surviving children from her custody and placing them in the care of the state Department of Human Services.

Graciella Trevino appeared in a state of shock before a packed hearing room.

According to police, Trevino's 15-year-old daughter, Claudia Trevino, was driving a 1997 Pontiac Grand Prix west on Osborn Street around 7:45 p.m. Monday when she failed to stop at a stop sign at 104th Avenue. A northbound pickup truck driven by Gerald Higgins broad-sided the sedan.

Claudia died at the scene.

Four passengers in the Grand Prix were hospitalized after the crash. A friend of Claudia, Thomas Perez, 15, and her brother, Carlos Torres Jr., 9, have been released from the hospital. Claudia's sister, Stephanie Trevino, 14, was in fair condition Friday evening at DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids. Claudia's youngest brother, Gerrardo Torres, 5, remains in critical condition at DeVos.

Graciella Trevino also has an infant child, who was born July 3.

Friday, Muskegon County Senior Assistant Prosecutor Timothy Maat presented a case alleging that Graciella Trevino knew that Claudia was driving with her siblings and had been previously warned about ending the practice.

"There's no way the mom could not have known Claudia was driving the car," Maat told the judge.

Edna Kass, a court-appointed attorney for the children, backed up Maat's statements. Kass has been working with the Trevino family in Muskegon County Court since June 2005, giving Muskegon jurisdiction over the emergency petition that began in Grand Rapids Family Court on Wednesday.

"I find it very hard to believe the mother did not know how much her child was using the vehicle," Kass told the judge. "Either the mother didn't care enough or she condoned where they were."

The prosecutor's petition also alleges that Trevino obtained illegal permanent residency papers and a false social security card for her daughter so she could work at a factory with her and transport the children while their respective shifts changed.

The prosecution said Trevino has given conflicting accounts of where she was when the accident occurred.

Trevino's defense attorney, Thoa K. Du of Corwin Law & Consulting, told the judge she did not think removing the children from their mother was in their best interest.

However, Marietti sided with the prosecution, placing the children in the care of human services, which will situate the children in the most family-like setting available, a Family Court administrator said.

"It is clear and convincing to me that Mrs. Trevino not only knew Claudia was driving, but that Claudia did so at the request of the mother," Marietti said. "That may have been driven by the mother's need to work, but that does not change the danger to the children. Even if there was not a fatal accident, this case is still sufficient for removing the children."

The court's decision will be reviewed within two weeks of Friday's hearing during a required dispositional review. During the review, Trevino's defense is allowed to present witnesses on her behalf. Du said she plans to have witnesses testify for her client.

"It was a tragic accident," Du said. "However, our argument at the hearing was that there was insufficient evidence to order the removal of the children."

In the meantime, Trevino will be allowed supervised time with her children. The judge ruled in favor of the petition's request to have an interpreter present during supervised visits to ensure that Trevino, who speaks very little English, does not threaten the children.

"Our perspective is, the hearing clearly proved that the mother allowed and directed (Claudia) to drive, placing the children in danger," Muskegon County Prosecutor Tony Tague said. "Because of the mother's improper supervision, we now have a dead 15-year-old child and other children in the hospital."

According to court records, Trevino, who is not a U.S. citizen, first gained custody of her children in June 2005. Prior to that, Trevino's children were in the care of Carlos Torres Sr., 39, Trevino's live-in boyfriend and father of Claudia's siblings. Court records did not indicate whether Torres was or was not Claudia's father.

The court believed Trevino listed Torres as Claudia's custodial parent because she was not a legal citizen.

However, Trevino requested custody of the children after Claudia told police she was sexually abused by Torres in March 2005.

According to court records, Claudia alleged fondling, forced oral sex and penetration by Torres. She also reported threats by Torres, including killing both her and her mother and taking her siblings away from her.

In court files, Trevino admitted to witnessing Torres fondling Claudia in late 2004, at which point he asked for forgiveness and said he would never touch

Claudia again. However, court records allege that Trevino still allowed Torres to be alone with Claudia on a regular basis.

Trevino admitted knowledge of a sexual assault witnessed by one of the siblings just four days before Claudia went to police, according to court records.

Torres eventually pleaded guilty to second-degree criminal sexual conduct, and was sentenced to 3-15 years in prison in September 2005. He is currently lodged in the Muskegon Correctional Facility, with his earliest possible release in December 2011 and maximum discharge in June 2020.

Meanwhile, a judge ruled in favor of Trevino's 2005 custody battle, granting her full custody of her four children in July of that year. Torres' parental rights were officially terminated in January 2006, courts records indicate.

In addition to Friday's hearing, Trevino had a case pending in Grand Rapids Family Court for the custody of her newborn daughter, Rosa. That case was also moved to Muskegon and brought to Marietti's attention at the end of Friday's hearing, but he said it would have to be discussed at a separate, future hearing.

Muskegon County prosecutors plan to turn over evidence from Friday's hearing to Ottawa County prosecutors for possible charges against Trevino, Tague said.

In Ottawa County, Trevino could face a charge of allowing an unlicensed minor to operate a motor vehicle, a misdemeanor, Tague said.

July 16, 2007**OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR**

Preparing for a Broken Home

By JAMES ANDREW MILLER

A FRIEND from business school, just engaged, boasted recently not about the virtues of his wife-to-be but about the Byzantine process he and she had gone through in constructing what he considered the finest of prenuptial agreements, as if there were some sort of poetry in the laborious detail involved in dividing assets and wealth. Months earlier, another friend, who had separated from her husband, told me she'd decided to go back with him, but only after the two of them had constructed a "post-nup" that left no doubt as to how their finances would be divided should they break up again.

I suppose both kinds of agreements are understandable in an era when so many marriages fail, but it seems sadly clear to me that both couples, for all their meticulous planning, had overlooked and ignored the most important point of all. Dividing up money and assets after a marriage falls apart can be a mess, but it's often nothing compared with the agony and emotional torment of a custody battle — dividing up the children. Money is, after all, only money — you can make it back, you can do with less of it if you need to, you can even file for bankruptcy. But children are not commodities that can be replaced.

Thus, a proposal, based on observation and my own recent experience of divorce: Engaged couples should enter into a new kind of arrangement, one that has nothing to do with houses or cars or the Warhol on the wall but focuses on any children born of the marriage. If two people can contemplate, before they ever marry, the possibility of what Walter Winchell called "splitsville" and agree in advance how they would divide assets, they ought to also be able to make sane arrangements for dividing time with their children.

For divorced parents, the financial equation is set as soon as the court or the arbitrator signs the order. Bank accounts, investments and pensions are divided, and child support and alimony are assigned. While it is true that support can be altered based on changing circumstances, most financial cases are settled, and lives go on. Judges generally adhere to common formulas for how the property should be divided, so it's possible to anticipate how your financial life will look after the marriage.

In the world of child custody, however, there are few certainties.

Two friends of mine who went through divorce recently were told that their soon-to-be-former spouses were "willing" to give them visiting rights every other weekend, plus one overnight stay per week. (The idea of "visiting" one's own children, when it first comes up, can be terribly jarring.) Both were outraged and each has started what promises to be a long, expensive and emotionally draining court battle for more of the children's time.

Such battles are often waged before judges who have unpredictable points of view about child custody. There are so many different types of custody schedules and ways of calculating what's fair to parents and children alike, that fathers, especially, stand a good chance of getting stuck with a plan they don't like — one that leaves them feeling like a second-class parent. Given crowded court schedules and a shortage of judges to hear cases, many custody battles can take up to a year or more to reach a conclusion.

Once a case is finally heard, neither parent can be certain of legal precedent or anything else that might steer the proceedings toward a mutually agreeable outcome. A custody evaluator or a judge can never understand a family's situation or individual children as well as the parents themselves do. Some couples have found that by the time the court has heard their custody case, many of the precious dollars divided between them in their prenup have found their way to the lawyers.

Absent a pre-arranged custody plan, the children in a divorce almost always start one custody schedule and then, once a court order is signed, must adapt to a new one. Worse, they may find themselves being used by one side or the other (or both) as bargaining chips or even strategic weapons.

For a parent, being without one's children at such a time, and having to watch from the sidelines as they are overtaken by anxiety and uncertainty, can make the custody battle by far the most traumatic aspect of the divorce experience.

With a custody schedule outlined before marriage, children could have a single structure for their new lives from the moment their parents separate. They would know where they will be and when, they wouldn't have to witness their parents arguing about the details, and they might not be subjected to custody evaluations or, worse, be required to testify in court.

In some states, pre-arranged custody schedules might not hold up in court, and one parent or the other might argue that circumstances have changed too much since they entered the agreement. Even then, though, an agreement could serve as a great starting point for negotiations.

Most of the pain involved in my own divorce would have been reduced by some kind of agreement before marriage detailing a custody schedule for children. I was fortunate enough to secure joint custody of my three children. But I would say to any two people contemplating a future together that however icy it may seem on the surface to include children's lives in legalistic affairs, a little coldness at the outset could help prevent glacially slow wars — wars directly involving the children — later on.

Besides, conversations about custody between two newly engaged people could give them both a window on what their future spouse will be like — and what he or she will expect as a parent. For a couple contemplating children, it is never too early to start discussing parenting roles.

Packing up the children's backpacks and preparing them to be picked up by a former spouse can be agonizing even in the best of circumstances. Even a prenup that outlines a custody schedule could never change that. But it could at least shield children from unnecessary pain and relieve some of the hurt for the parents.

James Andrew Miller is the author of "Running in Place: Inside the Senate" and co-author of "Live From New York: An Uncensored History of Saturday Night Live."

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ClickOnDetroit.com

Police: Man Scamming Elderly Couples

POSTED: 10:52 am EDT July 13, 2007
UPDATED: 7:53 pm EDT July 13, 2007

MADISON HEIGHTS, Mich. -- Warren police are warning senior citizens of a potential scam artist.

Police said a well-dressed, smooth-talking elderly man stole from three couple this week.

"It's clear he wasn't just walking up to houses at random," Detective Cpl. Mark Chrisitan told the Macomb Daily.

Officers said a 79-year-old Warren man and his 80-year-old wife were robbed in their home in the 26000 block of Roan Avenue, near 11 Mile and Hoover Roads in Warren.

"He claimed he was a friend of the victims' neighbor. He said he was lonely and just wanted to talk," Christian said.

According to the Macomb Daily, the elderly couple allowed the friendly man -- who identified himself as George Taylor -- into his home.

The couple allowed the man to use the restroom. He then reportedly convinced the husband to give him a ride to where his car was.

Once "George" was in the car with the elderly couple, he convinced them to stop at a home less than a mile away on Roan Drive, where he approached an 87-year-old man and his wife, age 80, the Macomb Daily reported.

The victims said he claimed he knew the husband and asked to use the bathroom.

"George" returned to the car, which the husband from the first home was in, and asked them to drop him off at his car near 12 Mile and Ryan roads, the Macomb Daily reported.

When the elderly couple returned home, they noticed two wristwatches were missing.

Afterward, "George" went to a third elderly couple's home on the 28000 block of Wauketa Street and greeted the couple and identified himself as a neighbor, according to the Macomb Daily.

"He knows my wife's name, he knows my name, and he's telling me that he talked with me, and I know I haven't met him," said an unidentified victim.

According to the elderly couple, they became apprehensive of him when he asked to use the bathroom.

"They were a little suspicious of the guy. They went to see what he was doing and found him in their bedroom, where he claimed he was looking for a towel," Christian told the Macomb Daily.

The husband, 91, agreed to give the man a ride and dropped him off at an Arby's parking lot on 12 mile Road in Madison Heights.

According to the man, "George" walked into an apartment building.

Nothing was stolen from the third couple's home, but the second couple reported a small amount of money missing from the wife's purse, according to police.

"That put us on guard now, for the rest of our lives. How much life we have left, I don't know? After you think about it, it's frightening," said an unidentified victim.

Police said this is an unusual case because of the man's age.

"There clearly was some advance work done here by the culprit," Christian told the Macomb Daily. "If this guy was 25 or 30 years old, they probably wouldn't let him in."

RELATED TO STORY



Video: Man Scams Senior Citizens

Police described "George" as a white male, around 75 years old, 5 feet 10 inches tall and 170 pounds with a "full head" of gray hair. He was wearing dark pants and a short-sleeved shirt.

Police are warning seniors to not engage strangers, regardless of age.

"No matter who they claim to be," Christian told Macomb Daily. "If you don't recognize them, do not let them in. Please call police."

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Center works to fight abuse on the elderly

Of The Oakland Press

Kirk Glezner spends his days advocating for elderly people to ensure they are not abused or taken advantage of in their own homes or nursing facilities.

Glezner is an ombudsman from the Center for Better Care, which works to protect elderly residents from abuse and neglect and from being exploited by their own families or caregivers.

Thanks to an increase in donations - including a \$15,000 grant from Pulte Homes and a combined total of \$15,000 from the Area Agency on Aging 1B in Southfield and VII in Saginaw - the center will have funds for an abuse educator and will be able to increase the number of people it helps, said Helen Hicks, executive director of the Center for Better Care.

The center focuses on more training programs in nursing homes and other facilities where the elderly are cared for, Hicks said, such as the type of training given at the Lahser Hills Care Center.

"We do a lot of training here to ensure there is no abuse," said Tracey Nelson, administrator at Lahser Hills in Southfield. Nelson said the training is above even what the center recommends. "We have a state program that runs eight hours," she said.

Hicks said such training is especially important for staff working with people who have dementia and Alzheimer's.

Elder abuse educators provided by the Center for Better Care work with long-term care staff, residents and their families to recognize and combat sexual, physical, emotional, financial abuse, neglect, exploitation and abandonment.

"There is serious under-reporting of these incidents," Hicks said. "We know that abuse is rampant outside of the nursing homes, as well, but we have no legal authority to enter a private home."

Elderly people often are reluctant to file an official complaint for fear of retaliation, so "if a resident tells us that they do not want the abuse reported, we cannot report it," under the guidelines of the Older Americans Act.

The donated money also will help pay for distribution of educational material, such as a brochure to be sent to physicians, advising them of the signs of elder abuse and how to report it.

"The most common kind of abuse is self-neglect," Hicks said. "The person is no longer able to care for themselves. But they are still trying and don't have enough support in the home." CBC will advocate for them as well as nursing home residents.

Ombudsmen such as Glezner work with long-term care facilities and their individual residents to secure open communication and resolve problems among staff and residents, producing a higher quality of care. They are paid by other agencies.

"We go in when there has been some kind of abuse reported, and we follow the case to its conclusion," Hicks said. "We are always on residents' side. A lot of calls come in about abuse."

"Besides sexual, physical and emotional abuse, financial exploitation is a huge abuse we run into every day," Hicks said.

"The most common exploitation happens in the nursing home," Hicks said. "Often a family member is supposed to pay the bills and are supposed to put 100 percent toward bills but will skim off money and don't account for it properly. Or they'll get the pension money and say they will pay it back and then they can't."

Glezner said this often happens even before elderly people get into a nursing home. All of their money is gone and then they have to find a facility that accepts Medicare and Medicaid insurance.

Sometimes a person will be faced with being kicked out of the nursing home because family members have used up all their money and they can no longer afford to stay.

"Next year, we hope to have a program for family members on that topic and tell them it is illegal and they will go to jail," said Hicks, "and they do."

"Nursing homes that are really trying to advocate for their residents will call us," Hicks said. If the CBC ombudsman can't do something to help, the agency will provide the patient with legal representation and assist in finding another home for the patient.

Glezner said the worst abuse he has seen was shortly after 9/11, when a 70-year-old Chaldean woman who required 24-hour care was beaten at an Oakland County facility.

"She was battered about the face, and the home claimed she fell between the beds. She couldn't speak the language," which made it more difficult to help her, said Glezner, who added it apparently was a hate-based attack on the woman in reaction to the attacks by radical Muslims.

Complaints to the state's Adult Protective Services 2006-2007

Statewide - 15,256 complaints and 2,823 substantiated* Oakland County - 1,153 complaints and 309 substantiated

Abuse complaints to local ombudsmen, statewide

July 2006 ÷ July 2007, 45 abuse complaints - 39 verified ÷ July 2005 ÷ July 2006, 45 abuse complaints - 34 verified ÷ July 2004 - July 2005, 36 abuse complaints - 17 verified

Source: Citizens for Better Care

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July 15, 2007

Bush Is Prepared to Veto Bill to Expand Child Insurance

By [ROBERT PEAR](#)

WASHINGTON, July 14 — The White House said on Saturday that President Bush would veto a bipartisan plan to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, drafted over the last six months by senior members of the Senate Finance Committee.

The vow puts Mr. Bush at odds with the Democratic majority in Congress, with a substantial number of Republican lawmakers and with many governors of both parties, who want to expand the popular program to cover some of the nation's eight million uninsured children.

Tony Fratto, a White House spokesman, said: "The president's senior advisers will certainly recommend a veto of this proposal. And there is no question that the president would veto it."

The program, which insured 7.4 million people at some time in the last year, is set to expire Sept. 30.

The Finance Committee is expected to approve the Senate plan next week, sending it to the full Senate for action later this month.

Senator [Max Baucus](#), the Montana Democrat who is chairman of the committee, said he would move ahead despite the veto threat.

"The Senate will not be deterred from helping more kids in need," Mr. Baucus said. "The president should stop playing politics and start working with Congress to help kids, through renewal of this program."

The proposal would increase current levels of spending by \$35 billion over the next five years, bringing the total to \$60 billion. The [Congressional Budget Office](#) says the plan would reduce the number of uninsured children by 4.1 million.

The new spending would be financed by an increase in the federal excise tax on tobacco products. The tax on cigarettes would rise to \$1 a pack, from the current 39 cents.

Mr. Fratto, the White House spokesman, said, "Tax increases are neither necessary nor advisable to fund the program appropriately."

Democrats in the House would go much further than the bipartisan Senate plan. They would add \$50 billion to the program over five years, bringing the total to \$75 billion. By contrast, in his latest budget request, Mr. Bush proposed an increase of \$5 billion over five years, which would bring the total to \$30 billion.

White House officials said the president had several other reasons to veto the bipartisan Senate plan.

"The proposal would dramatically expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, adding nonpoor children to the program, and more than doubling the level of spending," Mr. Fratto said. "This will have the effect of encouraging many to drop private

coverage, to go on the government-subsidized program.”

In addition, Mr. Fratto said, the Senate plan does not include any of Mr. Bush’s proposals to change the tax treatment of health insurance, in an effort to make it more affordable for millions of Americans.

Senator [Charles E. Grassley](#) of Iowa, the senior Republican on the Finance Committee, said he would like to consider such tax proposals. But, he said, “it’s not realistic — given the lack of bipartisan support for the president’s plan — to think that can be accomplished before the current children’s health care program runs out in September.”

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KALAMAZOO GAZETTE

Board may cut health services in because of a lack of state funding

Monday, July 16, 2007

By Rod Smith

Special to the Gazette

ALLEGAN -- The Allegan County Board of Commissioners may inform the state it is considering cutting health department services.

County Administrator Robert Sarro and Health Officer Rashmi Ganesan urged commissioners Thursday to adopt a resolution by the Michigan Association of Public Health saying the county will cut some public health services if the state doesn't come up with its half of the bill.

"This is a historical, monumental thing that the county is doing here," Ganesan told the commission.

The state requires the county to provide services for vision, hearing, immunization, communicable disease, sexually transmitted diseases, food, sewage and water and sets minimum standards in providing them. The problem, according to Ganesan, is that the state doesn't come close to providing its 50 percent of the cost, which it says it will do if money is available.

"County funding makes up 27 percent," Ganesan said, with the state kicking in 26 percent, or about \$390,000. The remainder comes from fees and grants. The state would nearly need to double its contribution to make 50 percent.

Ganesan said the county health department can't do more with less. "We can't even keep going the way we are," she said.

Thursday's 9-2 vote was to send the amended resolution for formal adoption at the July 26 meeting. Thiele and Jessup were the dissenters.

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Medicaid contracts out: scary

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FOREST TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, July 16, 2007

Journal Reader

I was livid when I saw a recent television news report that Medicaid is contracting out its health care responsibility to our sociopathic private insurance companies. The private sector in a capitalistic economic system like ours will be driven by profits and only profits. This is the one and only goal of capitalism.

How could Medicaid not reason that private insurance companies will insure no one but healthy people, who will keep costs low and increase profits? An intro to an economics course will teach this, unless their goal is to eliminate the sick.

Michael Virglio

Forest Township

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Urge Congress to improve benefits

Kalamazoo Gazette Letters

July 16, 2007

Food stamps are our nation's biggest hunger-relief program. Unfortunately, the benefit levels of this program make it a challenge to be adequately fed and remain healthy relying on this entitlement each month.

The House of Representatives is considering a bill (McGovern-Emerson Feeding America's Families Act, H.R. 2129) which would improve food-stamp benefits and expand eligibility for this crucial program.

During a time when 35 million Americans are food insecure, it's imperative that Congress act to improve this federal program that directly addresses the issue of hunger.

I urge you to call (800) 965-4298 and tell the operator you'd like to leave a message for U.S. Rep. Fred Upton and U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg, expressing your support for H.R. 2129.

You may also use the same number and ask to be connected to U.S. Sen. Debbie Stabenow and U.S. Sen. Carl Levin's offices, to leave a message, asking them to sign U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin's support letter to improve the food stamp program and express your support for S. 1529 (The Food Stamp Fairness & Benefit Restoration Act of 2007).

These timely actions are vital if we wish to alleviate hunger in America.

Bob Randels
Executive Director
Food Bank
of South Central Michigan



AMERICA'S MOST
PROGRESSIVE
COMMUNITY
NEWSPAPER

The Michigan Citizen - 2669 Bagley - Detroit - MI - 48216 Phone: 313-963-8282

Monday, JUL 16, 2007

Water shut off to 6300 more homes



Gwynn Gaines, of Call'em - Out! and the Poor People Economic Human Rights Campaign, brought the message of Detroit's struggle for water to participants at the United States Social Forum held recently in Atlanta. PHOTO BY KENNY SNODGRASS

the days immediately after a late fee amnesty instituted by Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick ended — during a heated exchange with Councilwoman JoAnn Watson and other council members July 2.

Mercado said only 1500 of the account holders have been able to pay to get their water back on, and said shut-offs are ongoing. He could not give figures for those who remain without water from shut-offs earlier this year and last year.

"You are shutting off all these thousands of people when the Water Affordability Plan has not been initiated," said Watson. "That's criminal. Turn the program on and turn the water back on. Water is a human right, not a privilege. These are poor people, single heads of households, seniors, and children, in a city that leads the nation in poverty and unemployment."

High salary

Mercado, who resides in West Bloomfield and makes more money than Kilpatrick, \$260,000, could not give the numbers of households including seniors and children that are without

Since May 17; City sits on Water Affordability Plan

By Diane Bukowski
[The Michigan Citizen](#)

DETROIT — The number of residences and businesses whose water has been shut-off since May 17 has risen to 6300, according to Detroit Water and Sewerage Department Director Victor Mercado. Only 300 of those are commercial accounts.

Mercado provided the figures — up from 4,000 in

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water.

"We shut off by address, we do not go by the customers' names or the family living at the property," he said.

One young woman told The Michigan Citizen that her water was shut off June 19 because her landlord had not paid his bill. She said she has a 2 year-old son and a 17 year-old brother staying with her.

"I had to get bleach bottles full of water to wash and flush the toilet and get ready to go to work, and had to buy water from the store to cook and drink," she said. "I had to leave out for a while with my son." She said her water is now back on.

Council President Pro-Tem Monica Conyers noted that water is being shut-off based on monthly estimated bills, but Mercado contended the estimated bills are balanced by an actual bill that comes every third month.

He claimed that most of the delinquent accountholders are simply refusing to pay, but said the only way he knew that was by the numbers who come to DWSD offices saying they cannot pay. He said that the department will work out payment arrangements to have the water re-connected, for less the half the amount owing, if customers call (313) 964-9090.

Users funding plan

A Water Affordability Plan for low-income residents was passed by council last June and water users are paying into the fund, but it has not yet been implemented.

Mercado said meetings with The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW), which is to oversee the program, have been delayed due to the resignation of its previous director Kathy Walgren.

Maureen Taylor of the Welfare Rights Organization said, "That's a lie. There have been no negotiations going on. The figures on the shut-offs are draconian and unbelievable."

Regarding the 50 cent monthly donations being made by Detroiters toward the Water Affordability Plan, DWSD communications head George Ellenwood said, "The monthly donations paid by City of Detroit residential, commercial and industrial customers are separate from the \$2.5 million set aside to fund the residential water assistance program designed by Roger Colton. Donation monies are currently going to the WAVE Fund to assist that non profit organization in making one-time emergency payments on behalf of Detroit families facing imminent water service shutoff."

He said only 12 percent of Detroiters have opted out of the plan , with \$156,000 collected so far out of a total of \$1,306,260 billed.

The plan as originally devised called for a \$5 million donation from DWSD, and staggered monthly payments of 50 cents per residential customer, with higher amounts from



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commercial and industrial customers. The payments were to be attached to the Water Affordability Plan, not WAVE, which is administered by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

Mercado said DWSD's \$5 million donation had been cut to \$2.5 million after the council voted for lower rate increases than he requested.

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Recently the Detroit Water Dept. embarked on a campaign of terror against Detroit residents. Beginning May 31, 2007 they targeted city water users who failed to enter the "water amnesty" program that most knew nothing about. The original plan the Director of the Detroit Water Dept., Victor Mercado, suggested was that he would be able to turn-off 4,000 delinquent accounts. He was delighted to report to City Council that he had exceeded that figure, and had in fact disconnected 6,300 water accounts in just over 30 days.

Scandalous!

While he sits on the Water Affordability Program (WAP) and practices delay after delay, after delay, the people continue to suffer. Welfare Rights helped organize and present the WAP to the Detroit City Council TWO years ago. They accepted and then approved its implementation.

There are millions of dollars exchanging hands within this treacherous Water Dept. Welfare Rights has sent observers to the useless Board of Water Commissioners meetings where you learn information about Water Dept. purchases of plastic gloves that cost Detroiters 10's to 1,000's of dollars! NO OTHER CITY in civilized America would accept 45,000 annual water shut offs and 6,300 done within one month. The headlines over the last few days have been about the Detroit Zoo Director and his failed attempts to falsify his credentials. No mention about the Detroit water crisis was considered important enough to cover anywhere.

We invite ALL 45,000 customers without water, especially the 300 commercial building owners and the other 6,000 residential customers who were just shut off to join the Water Affordability Program. The program is targeted to low and fixed income water customers. Those with higher incomes may not be eligible for enrollment, but we URGE ALL water users to support this project by donating the following amounts:

\$1.00/mo for residential customers (including public housing residents)...or \$12/year.

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\$3.00/mo for commercial customers (churches, sm. Businesses)...or \$36/year.

\$4.00/mo for municipal customers (schools & city buildings)...or \$48/year.

\$8.00/mo for industrial customers...or \$96/year.

There is a formula that calculates the monthly, affordable water bill payment for approved WAP members that is over and above this figure, and each category is different. Once enrolled, you are protected against shutoff, which is the way it was designed.

Detroit, let's get moving to save our community from further sadness and let's All join the WAP.

Questions? Call Michigan Welfare Rights Organization (313) 964-0618

(Detach this section and send your donation to THAW).

Yes! I want to enroll in the WATER AFFORDABILITY PLAN

Name:

Address:

City:

ZipCode:

Type Customer:

Residential []

Commercial []

Municipal []

Industrial []

Phone number(Optional):

Mail to:

THAW (The Heat & Warmth Fund)

1212 Griswold Street Detroit, MI 48226-1399

(On your check please write The W.A.P. on the memo line)



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07/14/2007

Theft charges dropped

BY VICTOR SKINNER

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AND CHRISTINE FINGER

cfinger@record-eagle.com

BEULAH — A judge dismissed criminal charges against a state employee accused of stealing from the Benzie County Government Center, a week before she was to stand trial.

District Court Judge Nancy Kida this week dismissed a case against State Department of Human Services worker Elaine Saffron, the last legal action stemming from a police probe into thefts from the county's government center.

Saffron, 49, was scheduled to stand trial July 19 on misdemeanor charges of larceny less than \$200 and receiving stolen property of the same amount. Police allege she stole a laptop computer.

"I didn't authorize the charges in the first place and some other reports have come into consideration that the authorizing prosecutor probably wasn't privy to," said Benzie County Prosecutor Anthony Cicchelli.

The bulk of the prosecution's case rested on allegations made by Saffron's estranged husband Brad Saffron, Cicchelli said.

"They bear on the ex-husband's credibility as well as his involvement in another case here from last year," he said. "Whenever you have estranged spouses and custody issues involved, unfortunately there is some underlying motivation to disparage the other party."

Saffron was suspended with pay from DHS pending the criminal complaint. She declined comment on the case Thursday.

Manistee Prosecutor Ford Stone initially was assigned to handle the criminal charges because of a potential conflict of interest involving Cicchelli. The probe also involved former Benzie maintenance supervisor Donald Zaleski and janitor Alan Blattner. Cicchelli declared a conflict of interest because of his friendship with Zaleski, who died in a car crash near Frankfort in December.

Blattner was convicted of a misdemeanor charge for stealing electricity to run a secret tanning bed in the janitor's shed and retained his job. Cicchelli took over Saffron's case from Stone last month.

Karen Stock, a DHS spokeswoman, said on Thursday the department had not been notified that Saffron's charges had been dismissed.

The DHS will conduct its own investigation to determine if the alleged crime impacted Saffron's work with the department, and she could return to work pending that inquiry, Stock said



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Published July 15, 2007



(Photo by Rod Sanford/Lansing State Journal)

Taking a walk: State workers are among the walkers on the pedestrian mall Wednesday between the Hall of Justice and the Capitol. State budget shortfalls have increased the pressure on many state workers.

Wages compared to other states

Michigan ranks 11th in state civil servant pay, according to the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The average salary for state government employees in the U.S. is \$45,250, according to that 2006 report.

1. California \$61,877
2. Colorado \$57,702
3. Connecticut \$56,665
4. Iowa \$55,306
5. Minnesota \$53,804
11. MICHIGAN \$49,783
46. South Carolina \$36,042
47. Mississippi \$34,249
48. Missouri \$34,063
49. Arkansas \$33,331
50. West Virginia \$33,163

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, March 2006

STATE WORKER CUTS, CONCESSIONS

State worker pay and benefits have been negatively impacted on multiple occasions since 1991:

1991-92 - About 2,500 state workers accept the first early retirement packages offered during Gov. John Engler's tenure.

1992 - State police union negotiators agree to a wage and benefit freeze with the state, the first time in which all state employee unions agree to a pay freeze.

1994 - State sells its accident fund to Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan for \$255 million. About 400 state jobs leave with it.

1996 - 5,100 state workers accept an early retirement package.

1996-97 - State eliminates 320 jobs by privatizing the Liquor Control Commission, ending state liquor distribution. The move caused an uproar as employees got 30-day layoff notices weeks before Christmas.

1997 - The defined benefit pension plan for state employees ends. New employees sign on to a defined contribution 401(k) plan.

2002 - 7,857 state workers, about 12.5 percent of the state work force, opt for an early retirement package in the largest mass retirement in state history.

2003-04 - All but one of the state employee unions agree to wage concessions, including furlough days. Workers represented by the Human Services Support Unit of Service Employees International Union Local 517M, who rejected concessions, were ordered to take two days off without pay. Several other concessions, including banked pay and increased prescription drug contributions, follow.

2006 - The Michigan State Police Troopers Association donates \$400,000 to the state to pay for the salaries of 29 state troopers due to be laid off.

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State employees: Under siege?

Cut, cut and cut again, state workers feel stretched, anxious and uncertain

Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

Deb Ruiz is a family independence specialist who spends her workdays helping people get food, arrange day care and avoid losing their homes to foreclosures.

It's a stressful job under the best of circumstances, which these are decidedly not.

"Our workload itself, our responsibilities have probably quadrupled because of the early retirement and the staff that our previous governor cut," said Ruiz, who has worked for the state since 1986.

"The workers feel responsible and dedicated to getting everything done that they need to get done, and it's impossible. It's real frustrating."

Across Michigan, state government workers feel unappreciated and under siege these days.

This spring, there was serious talk of a partial government shutdown because of the state's budget crisis and political stalemate.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, is demanding that Gov. Jennifer Granholm work to take back the 2 percent pay raises state workers are scheduled to get in October.

And last month, hundreds complained that their privacy was invaded when the Lansing State Journal posted a database listing their salaries on its Web site.

"They feel like they're being picked on; they feel like they're being targeted," said Sandra Parker, president of UAW Local 6000, which represents about 17,000 state workers.

State government is mid-Michigan's largest employer, and the 14,100 workers on its payroll help stabilize the region's economy.

But the state's political and economic instability is creating anxiety and uncertainty.

The signs are visible throughout state government.

Twenty-nine state troopers were pink-slipped this spring, and their jobs were saved only after their union, the Michigan State Police Troopers Association, donated \$400,000 to the state to pay for their salaries.

Foster care workers, child protection service workers and probation officers are among groups with much higher caseloads than they've had in the past.

The state is incarcerating 1,700 more prisoners than it did in 2001, but the number of corrections officers has dropped from 9,651 to 8,843.

Smaller staffs mean greater risks, said Mel Grieshaber, executive director of the Michigan Corrections Organization.

"You'll be in areas where you had three or four officers, and you go down to two," he said. "The union, frankly, raises hell about that constantly because staffing equates to safety."

Coveted jobs

In the Lansing area, jobs in state government have long been highly coveted because of the pay, benefits and security they provide.

But veteran workers say they are an easy and frequent target when the economy heads south.

"Every administration going back to (William) Milliken has asked state employees to give up something," said Randy Watkins, a senior insurance investigator. "At what point, do you stop asking your employees to give up something?"

The state's classified work force - which represents the overwhelming majority of employees - has declined from almost 67,000 in 1990 to fewer than 54,000 today.

Hundreds lost state jobs when the Accident Fund of Michigan was sold in 1994 and liquor distribution was privatized in 1997.

Negotiated pay raises were mostly slim or none while Republican John Engler was governor from 1991 to 2002.

State workers hired since March 1997 don't get traditional pensions but instead take part in defined contribution plans similar to 401(k)s.

More than 15,000 state workers took early retirement in three offerings between 1991 and 2002, snaring better benefits but leaving a larger workload for the employees who stayed on the job.

Watkins said that in his case, there are fewer investigators looking into complaints against insurance agents, meaning it takes longer for consumers to get a resolution.

He said frustrations are growing among staff, who he said continue to provide good service under trying conditions.

"I think there was a feeling at one point that we are doing something good, and we enjoy what we do. Now it's becoming, 'Boy I am really tired. I can't wait till there's an early out,' " he said.

Perceptions vary

There remains a sharp division within Michigan about whether state workers are overworked or overpaid.

A study released earlier this year by the conservative Mackinac Center for Public Policy concludes that pay and benefits for state government employees far exceed compensation in the private sector.

For instance, a state receptionist is compensated much better than one at the Lansing Chamber of Commerce, the study found.

A separate study, released last year by the American Federation of Teachers, found that while many state workers in Michigan generally earn more than public employees in other states, Michigan's state workers in a number of professional fields earn significantly less than their private sector counterparts.

Roberto Mosqueda, president of the Michigan State Employees Association, said some state workers in Michigan, such as master plumbers and master electricians, would earn substantially more than the \$24 or \$25 an hour they are paid by the state if they were working in the private sector.

"You go into the private sector, and an electrician is making \$30 to \$40 an hour easy," he said.

The public has reason to be concerned when the state work force is stretched thin and morale sags, said Peter Berg, associate professor in the School of Labor and Industrial Relations at Michigan State University.

"In general, when people feel overworked and stressed out and unappreciated, they are less likely to be productive in their jobs, and there's more likely to be absenteeism, and state services are more likely to be affected," Berg said.

More givebacks coming?

Sen. Bishop added a new layer of tension recently when he called on Granholm to rescind 2 percent pay increases that state workers are scheduled to get in October.

Granholt doesn't have the authority to do that unilaterally, but she could try to extract concessions from unions, as she did a few years ago.

"All of us need to share in the burden of getting this ship righted," Bishop said, "because if we don't, we'll continue to spin out of control."

Parker, the UAW Local 6000 president, said it seems like political retaliation.

"To me, it's almost like we are getting punished for Gov. Granholt being re-elected," she said. "The Republicans have come after us in every way they can, and they won't leave us alone."

Granholt has said she won't try to take back the promised pay raise, but indicated she will seek additional savings from state employees in new contracts that begin Jan. 1.

A spokeswoman for Granholt said the governor is concerned about state workers.

"The state employees are on the front lines of so many things that are important to residents - protecting children, protecting public health and safety, protecting our health and environment, food safety and so on," spokeswoman Liz Boyd said. "Given the rhetoric, it's understandable if they feel they are under siege."

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or candrews@lsj.com.

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